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(Article begins on next page)

Infections and stroke: which potential pathogenic mechanism?

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Dear Editor,

In a recent cohort-study, Pearce et al evaluated the potential association between chronic infections and stroke. Serological evidence of prior infection was categorized based on immunoglobulin G to cytomegalovirus, hepatitis A virus, hepatitis B virus, *Toxoplasma gondii*, and *Toxocara* spp. The positive association was significant among patients aged 20-59 years ($p = 0.005$) (1).

Helicobacter pylori (*H. pylori*) infection is a chronic one, acquired during childhood as a rule. The habitat of the bacterium is the stomach, where it is the major causal factor of several gastroduodenal diseases (2). Moreover, *H. pylori* has been involved in diverse extragastric manifestations, including cardiovascular disease (3) and stroke (4).

This microorganism could be a model to understand how an infectious agent could act in the pathogenesis of thrombosis in case of stroke.

While atherosclerosis is an inflammatory disease in which immune mechanisms interact with metabolic factors to initiate, propagate, and activate lesions in the arterial tree, endothelial dysfunction is an early key event in the onset of acute events (5). *H. pylori* genomic material has been detected in the plaque of atherosclerosis only in sporadic occasions. Therefore, the hypothesis of an indirect pathway has been raised. Indeed, the long-term inflammation generated by *H. pylori* might raise cytokine levels in the bloodstream, and consequently, activate fibroblast and smooth muscle cell proliferation. Some study has shown that *H. pylori* binds von Willebrand factor and interacts with glycoprotein Ib to induce platelet aggregation (3). Its glycoproteins Ib and IIb/IIIa engage surface molecules on the endothelium cell, which may contribute to endothelial activation (5).

Because stroke is the outcome of a multiplicity of factors and processes (6), complete understanding of causation is difficult.

Considering the interesting findings reported by Pearce et al (1), prospective population-based studies should be performed in order to provide support for a causal relationship.

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